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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## U.S. Comparison with Swiss HIV Knowledge Survey Should Be on Like Basis

We just want to comment on the article by Barbara Gerbert and Bryan Maguire, "Public Acceptance of the Surgeon General's Brochure on AIDS" (*Public Health Reports*, March-April 1989, pp. 130-133). The comparison with the Swiss analysis (*British Medical Journal*, Oct. 31, 1987, pp. 1118-1120) should be established on a similar basis as presented in the following table:

| Category                              | USA<br>(percent) | Switzerland<br>(percent) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Did remember the brochure . . . . .   | 59               | 75                       |
| Totally read . . . . .                | 40               | 40                       |
| Partially read . . . . .              | 6                | 16                       |
| Glanced at it . . . . .               | 6                | 7                        |
| Did not read . . . . .                | 8                | 11                       |
| Did not receive or did not remember . | 41               | 25                       |

NOTE: Columns do not add to 100 because of rounding error.

In Switzerland, 84 percent of those who recalled receiving the brochure reported reading at least some of it, and 88 percent in the United States. Presenting the same data otherwise, 46 percent of American and 56 percent of Swiss respondents read some part of it. This correction does not change the conclusion of the article about the acceptance of the brochure, but it shows an improvement of the distribution may help to reach more people and consequently increase the effectiveness of an information campaign.

*Dominique Hausser, MD, MSc, and Philippe Lehmann, Sociologist, Institut Universitaire de Médecine Sociale et Préventive, Lausanne, Switzerland*

## Authors' Response

While we reported United States readership as a percentage of those who remember receiving the pamphlet, we reported Swiss readership as a percentage of the total population to whom the pamphlet had been mailed. As Hausser and Lehmann point out, this creates the false impression that there was a much higher readership level for the American audience than for the Swiss. The figures they present make the appropriate comparison between the two data sets.

We agree with Hausser and Lehmann that the high readership levels among those who remember receiving the pamphlet force us to take a hard look at the distribution of this sort of information. However, we should be careful about inferring causal direction: people did not

read the pamphlet because they remembered receiving it; they remember receiving it because they read it.

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## Let Us Not Overlook Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies

As an outside observer, I read with interest the article on "The Revitalization of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps" (March-April 1989). I realize that in an article of this nature, which covers so much background information, one cannot mention all of the Corps accomplishments.

One of the great prevention activities not mentioned, which I feel should not be overlooked, is the fluoridation of public water supplies and the tremendous oral health benefit it has been to the people of this country. The Corps provided much of the early research and, in cooperation with organized dentistry and State and local health departments, has provided much of the "push" that has seen the widespread implementation of this preventive health measure.

We on the State level appreciate the support and mutual cooperation that have long been evident between the Corps and the State health departments. The Corps can be proud of its contribution to the oral health of this country.

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